

AMENDMENTS TO THE CLAIMS

1. (**Currently amended**) A method for isolating infection-defective hepatitis C virus (HCV) structural protein complexes from cells infected with a baculovirus encoding and expressing HCV structural proteins, comprising:

a) lysing the infected cells to yield a lysate, wherein the cells are lysed by incubating the cells in a buffer containing digitonin and protease inhibitors, wherein the concentration of digitonin is less than or equal to 0.25% and wherein the cells are lysed without sonication; and

b) adding polyethylene glycol to the lysate to form a precipitate that comprises the infection-defective HCV structural protein complexes.

2. (**Original**) The method of claim 1 wherein further comprising the step of fractionating the precipitate by gradient ultracentrifugation to provide a fraction comprising said complexes.

3. (**Canceled**) ~~The method of claim 1 wherein the cells are lysed by incubating the cells in a buffer containing digitonin and protease inhibitors.~~

4. (**Canceled**)

5. (**Currently amended**) A method for isolating infection-defective hepatitis C virus (HCV)-like particles from cells infected with a baculovirus encoding the expressing HCV structural proteins, comprising:

a) lysing the infected cells to yield a lysate, wherein the cells are lysed by incubating the cells in a buffer containing digitonin and protease inhibitors, and wherein the concentration of digitonin is less than or equal to 0.25%, wherein the cells are lysed without sonication; and

b) centrifuging the lysate through a cushion comprising a monosaccharide, disaccharide, or polysaccharide to provide a pellet comprising a preparation of HCV-like particles, wherein said preparation contains HCV-like particles that are heterogenous in size.

6. (**Original**) The method of claim 5 wherein further comprising the step of fractionating the pellet by gradient centrifugation to provide a fraction comprising said preparation of heterogenous HCV-like particles.

7. (Canceled)
8. (Canceled)
9. (Currently amended) A method for isolating infection-defective hepatitis C virus-like particles from cells infected with a baculovirus ~~an expression system~~ encoding and expressing HCV structural proteins, comprising:
 - a) incubating the cells in a hypertonic solution;
 - b) incubating the cells in a hypotonic solution;
 - c) lysing the cells to yield a lysate, wherein the cells are lysed by incubating the cells in a buffer containing digitonin and protease inhibitors, wherein the concentration of digitonin is less than or equal to 0.25% and wherein the cells are lysed without sonication; and
 - d) centrifuging the lysate through a cushion to provide a pellet comprising a preparation of HCV-like particles that are substantially homogeneous, wherein said HCV-like particles are approximately 50 nm in diameter.
10. (Original) The method of claim 9 further comprising the step of fractionating the pellet by gradient ultracentrifugation to provide a fraction comprising said substantially homogeneous HCV-like particles.
11. (Canceled) ~~The method of claim 9 wherein the cells are lysed by incubating the cells in a buffer containing digitonin and protease inhibitors.~~
12. (Original) The method of claim 9 wherein the HCV-like particles comprise E1 and E2-p7 proteins of HCV.
13. (Original) The method of claim 9 wherein the HCV-like particles comprise E1 and E2 without p7 proteins of HCV.
- 14-22 (Canceled)